

## Interview with Peter F. Secchia

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PETER F. SECCHIA

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: June 6, 1994

Copyright 1998 ADST

*Q: Today is June 6, 1993. This is an interview with Ambassador Peter F. Secchia concerning his time as Ambassador to Italy. Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could start off by giving me something of your background—where did you come from, your education, etc.?*

SECCHIA: I began my life in New Jersey. I left at 18 (after high school) to head west and never got any further than Michigan. I attended Michigan State University and tried to work my way through school but couldn't quite afford that. I dropped out and went into the United States Marine Corps. I had two terms in the Marine Corps and then decided that I needed an education.

*Q: Excuse me, could we get some dates on the Marine Corps?*

SECCHIA: Yes, I joined the Marine Corps in 1956 after one year at Michigan State University. I had been appointed to the Air Force Academy by my Congressman but my eyes were not correctable. I had decent scholastic testing numbers but I was from a family of immigrants and really hadn't prepared myself for university. I ended up going into the Marine Corps in the spring of 1956, reenlisting in 1957 and coming out in late 1959 after serving in the Mediterranean (with NATO). I came out as an E4 enlisted man, sergeant,

## Library of Congress

with three meritorious promotions. I went back to the university, borrowed money and worked my way through. Finally graduating in the winter of 1963. I really left the university in 1962 a few credits short for my degree and picked up the last credits while working in a lumber mill in British Columbia and learning the lumber business. I started as a salesman.

I became active in politics with Congressman Gerald R. Ford in 1964 and 1966. By 1968 I became a good friend of his. Meanwhile I became vice president of sales in my company and when Ford lost in 1976 I became the county chairman for the Republican Party, which was his hometown. I then became the district chairman and went up to be national committeeman in 1981. I helped George Bush defeat Pat Robertson, who had been his challenger in the Michigan primary. I still see Jerry Ford regularly and I am on the Executive Committee of his Foundation.

*Q: Pat Robertson was a fundamentalist radio preacher, wasn't he?*

SECCHIA: Well, he was an evangelical media charismatic kind of a dynamic person. But the Bush and Baker team had asked me to try to roll back his gains in Michigan. I got to know George Bush very well over the next three years. I had known him, Ford had introduced me to him back in 1975 when Bush was Party Chairman right after Watergate of 1974, before Ford made him head of CIA bringing him home from China where Nixon had sent him.

After the election of 1988, I was asked by the President if I would like to be involved in his administration. I really didn't have an interest. I am not a fan of Washington. Within its pockets of communities like this one, I am sure it is a normal place, but I don't see much difference between Las Vegas and Washington. In both you gamble and they both have neon lights and both have very short success spans. So . . . I wasn't interest in coming to Washington.

In early December of 1988, Rich Bond, who was then political advisor to the President, asked we why I didn't want to become an ambassador. I said that I really didn't have an

## Library of Congress

interest. But then after I thought of my grandparents emigrating from Italy and the fact that I thought I could do a good job, I put my name in and went through the process of the next two months. There were Washington Post stories about 112 candidates for the post. 112 friends of the President and they listed them all. There was a humorous editorial in the Post I remember that said that they ought to have an ambassador for every one of the 96 provinces and then everybody would be happy. Then on February 1, George Bush called me and I thought he was calling to tell me that he had to go with one other. Walter Curley, who became Ambassador to Paris, had been in line for this. There were several other candidates. John Sununu called me and said, "Peter, wouldn't you take another post?" I didn't want to be "an ambassador," I wanted to be the Ambassador "to Italy." On the first of February when George Bush called and asked me if I would accept, I was very excited. On February 11 the story broke but my nomination came during the John Tower difficulties and the press was on a roll.

*Q: Could you mention what the John Tower difficulties were for the record?*

SECCHIA: When John Tower had been nominated for Secretary of Defense he was attacked violently by the political opposition. It was a very uncomfortable period of about 45 days and eventually his nomination was withdrawn.

As you have a change in administration...I don't know if it works both ways, I know whenever there is a Republican administration there is always the "career people only" argument and "these people aren't qualified" arguments. I might say here that I think we proved our critics wrong. I received the highest award the State Department gives (the Distinguished Honor Award), which is seldom awarded and very rarely given to a Presidential appointee. It is "for having an impact on American foreign policy," which we can discuss later, but primarily for the extradition of the first Arab terrorist in the history of our country and for the work during the Gulf War and the denuclearization of Europe.

## Library of Congress

But, when my name came up, of course being a “political appointee,” as those who defend careerists like to call them...I would like to put it in the category of if I were elected chairman of IBM I would put people I knew into important positions. People I felt I could trust, people who could run my key offices, that I was familiar with and weren't part of the past regime or part of an unknown corps. And I think that is why a majority of our G7 nations usually end up with a friend of the President. And I will give you examples of why that works better later.

*Q: What you are mentioning here is in a way I think the...I am a retired Foreign Service officer myself...the opposition to this really comes from somewhere else, I think from what I call other posts which are very definitely political handouts. In the first place money is a problem. It has been expected that if a political appointee has access to a President this means clout within the embassy.*

SECCHIA: Yes, the “clout” (your term) is really “access.” Let me give you an example. During the Gulf War we could not get Italian jets into Abu Dhabi. During the initial Somalia feeding we couldn't get the Italian troops which President Bush had asked President Amato to provide. Amato gave more troops than anybody in the world other than...I think they out did France, the French sent 3200 and Italy sent 4000...I'm a little fuzzy on the numbers. At the time Bush wanted the Italian commitment because the Italians had sent forces to all of the peacekeeping missions of the UN, 13 of them. They missed one. So it was significant that 1), they help and 2), that they take a major position. But they are such a peace loving people and really don't go out of their country, they seldom send their troops out. The Gulf War was the first time since the Second World War because they were restricted both through constitutional law and through their culture to send troops overseas. But Bush (an American government) had asked the Italians for support and the Italians committed. The planes were ready to go. There was big press. The Italians, an emotional people, the Minister of Defense was on television. “they are ready to go” he said. But they didn't have a landing time slot. My career people were unable

## Library of Congress

to get an answer so I just called the White House, and of course I knew Brent Scowcroft personally...

*Q: He was the National Security Advisor.*

SECCHIA: He was out. I talked to his deputy, Adm. Jon Howe, who was a friend of mine when he was CINCSOUTH (Commander-in-Chief, Southern Forces for NATO). He was a very bright, caring military leader. He arranged for me to talk to General Joe Hoar, who was in charge of the Somalia operation. He had been, I think, Chief-of-Staff for General Norman Schwarzkopf in the Gulf. I called Gen. Joe Hoar and he got the Italians the landing slots. Had I not been able to do that as a career person, not circumvent the system, those planes would have had to detour into either Luxor, Egypt where the Egyptians had already told us we could only stay one hour (these were armed troops), or to Kenya where there was already a problem with backed up airplanes. So this is an example and I don't like to say political appointee...George Bush had a lot of people he appointed who weren't politically involved. They were friends he knew or trusted or respected. I would like to say a "Presidential Appointee." Realistically they are all Presidential appointees, career or political...

*Q: Absolutely.*

SECCHIA: ...so let's just say a non-career Presidential appointee versus a career. Colin Powell who is also an acquaintance of mine, called George Bush after this Sunday evening activity to say: "You tell Secchia to stop calling my general officers." Bush told me. But he added, "Bravo. A job well done, Peter." I had to get the job done. My career people had problems wading through the bureaucracy. The Italians were up tight waiting. That is only one example.

*Q: Let's go to your appointment. I recall the press gave you a rough time.*

SECCHIA: Oh, it was terrible.

## Library of Congress

*Q: Could you talk about that?*

SECCHIA: Well, anybody who has had a rough time would like to tell you what they thought the opposition was attempting to do. I had political enemies and some business enemies. You can't take on a Presidential candidate who thinks he has been asked by God to run for office, beat him, and not have his followers think God mad at you.

*Q: You are talking about Robertson?*

SECCHIA: Yes. The Pat Robertson people printed and distributed flyers about me. All they needed was for one person to say that I had told a dirty joke or used some foul language and that became a monstrosity. I became something less than a human being to some of those people. Let me give you one example. During my nomination as I was sitting at a table across from Claiborne Pell, not the most charismatic and brightest man in the United States Senate. He was reading a newspaper clipping in front of him (I asked for a copy of it afterwards) which was 14 column inches. The original story was 23 column inches. Somebody had razor bladed out the positive paragraphs about me. Now you know how the press does a story. Even if they want to get you, they balance the story by putting in some quotes from your supporters...others would say "he is a decent human being who has done good things." Meanwhile, so-and-so says "he has a bias." Somebody had razor bladed out my positive paragraphs, which were nine column inches, left in all the negative (and background), which were fourteen column inches and re-faxed it. Now the early days of the fax machines you couldn't tell they were razor bladed. Lois Romano of the Washington Post brought this to my attention. She had seen the original article and she had seen the "faxed" second article. I asked her where she saw it. She said that it had been sent to her from the House Foreign Relations Committee offices. Now, obviously somebody on their staff had sent it to them. They had a person there against me... or bush? There were people there who had worked for the Democrats in Michigan who obviously would love to get even with me, a highly colorful partisan zealot, which I was. So

## Library of Congress

I had two anti-Secchia groups, the evangelical right and the Democrat left who were both wanting to make my life uncomfortable.

Then you had the Sarbanes and the Bidens who did, as they always do, wanting to defeat Presidential appointees, make it difficult for a new Presidential administration to get their appointments. There is always a shot fired across the bow, even within a Party. For instance, Malcolm Wallop, a conservative Republican held up my nomination. This was disastrous for me because I was on the floor of the Senate to be approved because the President was going to Rome late in May of 1989. He let it be known through his newly formed staff, in March of 1989, that he would like me to be in Rome when he got there. The previous ambassador had been there eight years—Max Rabb who had been extended under Reagan (a very rare occurrence), was 80 years old—and Bush wanted to send a signal. It was his first European visit as President and he wanted his ambassador to be there to host him.

In the conservative caucus within the Senate (I don't have all the facts), there was agreement made that they wanted to have a weekly meeting with Sununu and the White House staff. They were setting the standards for the next four years. They weren't able to get that appointment. However, they knew that Bush wanted me in Rome by May 28, so the conservative caucus said, "We'll hold up Secchia and we will get him to meet with us." So it wasn't partisan, it was inter-party selfishness. Malcolm Wallop is another man for whom I have very little respect.

*Q: He is the Senator from Wyoming.*

SECCHIA: I have very little respect for him because of the embarrassment he gave my family because of his action. What he did was embarrass us because once my nomination was pulled by a Republican, the press then just assumed that they had discovered evil actions by me. The Senate then went into Easter recess. For 30 days there were these charges. One time it was said that maybe that is what they found. One time it was said

## Library of Congress

that this is what they found. To the reporters in Washington, it became an echo chamber. They would write it and the Italian press would repeat it and then the New York press would repeat what the Italian press said. So the Post would write a story on what the New York Times said and not have any facts. And then the Italian papers would write the same story and then the New York papers would write what the Italian papers said and the Washington papers would write what the New York papers said over - and over again.. So it became a vicious merry-go-round of rumors that I had done all kinds of things which I had never done. It was fed by people like Sarbanes saying we shouldn't have these kinds of appointments, "why are they qualified." I mean, my God, you don't have to be qualified to be a Senator. We get some of the biggest losers in the world in the United States Senate, but you have to be qualified to be an ambassador? This became a very difficult situation.

Dick Cheney (of Wyoming), who had been appointed in place of John Tower after that failed nomination, tried to help me. But Malcolm Wallop (of Wyoming) had a new bride and had gone off to his ranch. He wasn't taking phone calls. He hadn't even had a press conference to tell why he had held my nomination. So Sununu called me in June and said, "Peter, here is the deal. Wallop will release your nomination if we agree to do what he wants, to meet with his caucus of Senators on a monthly basis." And I said, "Do you want to do that?" He said, "Hell, no. We don't have time to meet with each of these groups every month." I said, "Well, fine, tell him to buzz off." So they told him to "buzz off" and in the meantime my nomination continued in suspense and all of this conjecture...so it got worse. President Bush flew to Wyoming in mid-June with Malcolm Wallop and talked to him. I don't know if they ever gave him anything, I hope they didn't, but he dropped his opposition and I was approved in late June.

*Q: What did this do to your family? I am trying to build up a feeling for researchers.*

SECCHIA: Just terrible. Seven hundred of my hometown people paid \$50 a piece to come out and have a big charity party to say, "Bravo Pete," because I had been a do-gooder



## Library of Congress

in my community and was involved in a lot of activities. Sure, I told some off color jokes and sure I used some foul language, but I was a son of immigrants, I had been a street fighter. I had started my own business. As I said I started out as a salesman and ended up chairman of the board of a Fortune 500 company. I didn't get there by being nice to everybody. So I had a miserable time. My daughter at the time was a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame. I remember she called me one day. There was a full page story and ugly picture of me in "Newsweek" calling me the "Ambassador of Dirty Words," or something to that effect. She said, "Dad, I was walking across campus and one of my friends showed me this full page story." She is a lovely lady. She has superior grades, she goes to church, she is a neat kid and I just felt terrible for her. But she was wonderful. She said, "Dad, we love you, don't let this bother you." My wife and kids were great through all of this.

The discomfort...let me tell you what happened in May, we thought we were going to be cleared in mid-May in the Senate and we were to go to Washington (sworn in), go off to Vermont to our other daughter's university graduation, and then fly back to New York and on to Rome. This was to be there two or three days before the President arrived. We packed our bags, the names went to the Senate, (I think it is a resolution that they do at the end of the day that gathers all the open activities). I forget the word now but as I found out that evening, it was an uncomfortable situation.

Our house had been closed. Our two boys were in high school and had been given early exams because this was the third week in May, and our daughter was graduating from the University of Vermont. Our other daughter was a sophomore at Notre Dame and was out of school already. We were all packed ready to go to Rome. We were sitting on our back porch, eight or nine o'clock in the evening, with our Vice President of Finance (from the company) of which I was Chairman of the Board and a 53 percent shareholder (which was doing about \$300 million in sales and had 1500 employees).

## Library of Congress

I was sitting there with my vice president of finance saying, "Mike, somebody has to watch over my properties, my stock, my investments, I can't for the next four years. You are the financial guy, if you see big problems you are going to have to call me. I can't be involved in management, but I trust you." I thought we had to have someone back here in the States to watch over our home. You can't sell your home. Career guys, they move around all their lives. I have been in this house for 20 years, my kids all went to school in this community...am I going to sell the house? Go to Rome and when we come back home, where are we going to live? So I have to leave the house open (\$50,000 a year). You have to make the decisions to pay all the taxes, keep the house open (or lose your wife).

I am sitting out there with him, we have a bottle of wine and we are going to have a toast. We are leaving in the morning and we get a phone call from Margaret Tutweiler at about 9 p.m., who says, "Are you packed and ready to leave, Peter?" And I say, "Sure, we are." She says, "Don't come to D.C." I say, "What is the matter?" And she says, "We don't know. Someone held up your nomination at the end of the Senate session. We don't know what happened. The Secretary (Baker) is working the phones right now." Half an hour later I get a phone call from Ambassador Howard Wilkens who says, "I just had dinner with Bob Dole and he said your nomination went through tonight. Congratulations."

Somebody else called who had had dinner at Bill Siedman's home (he was then head of the FDIC, or head of Resolution Trust). He had had dinner with another Senator who said, "Pete's nomination went through today." These were people I had known for twenty years, some of them U.S. Senators. So we were confused. We were getting calls of congratulations and calls saying we think there is a problem. What's the problem?

Well, the next day we are still home and D.C. says, "Don't fly to Rome, your name was pulled off the list and we don't know why." So we fly to Vermont for our daughter's graduation and Saturday morning I am sitting on the edge of my bed trying to find out what happened, nobody would tell me. They didn't want me to know what happened because they were afraid I would go find Senator Wallop and squeeze his head until his

## Library of Congress

feet swelled up. This was terrible. Obviously the press then began to write "Secchia's name yanked," "A discovery? What did they find?" And this was Senator Malcolm Wallop who was playing his silly little game. But at the time I didn't know what his game was, I just knew my name had been pulled and wondered "what terrible Democrat did that?" When they found out it was a Republican it was even worse, like "Aha, Secchia must be a bad guy because a Republican pulled his name."

And then everybody goes on spring recess and there is nobody in D.C. but the reporters. They are talking to the staff and the staff is talking to the cab drivers and the cab drivers are telling the rumors, and I am getting brutalized.

I am on CNN and the lead story on NBC says that a "\$100,000 giver buys his embassy." I gave George Bush \$1,000, but NBC news shows me as a \$100,000 giver to buy my ambassadorship. Well, that gets other people angry at me. Then "Newsweek" shows me as "Ambassador of Dirty Words" and people who don't like dirty words get mad at me. The right wing evangelicals were already mad at me and the Democrats loved rubbing it in. Then Sarbanes says, "You see, we told you the President was going to have lousy nominees, first Tower and now Secchia."

Tower was accused of womanizing, for drinking (a lot of things), at least that is what they accused him of. I am being accused of hardly anything when you get right down to it. I told a dirty joke—it wasn't even a dirty joke, it was a typical men's drinking joke. I didn't do it in public. I told it to a group of political friends (I thought).

So I am getting destroyed. Meanwhile my family is embarrassed. You asked me about my family, it is a miserable period for them because every day...it's the New York Times...or ?? My wife and I went to Canyon Ranch in Tucson to hide and get away from this and just get some fresh air. To walk and get some exercise in early June. The second day there, I am in a story the New York Times, a picture of me and an article which talks about what a terrible choice I am.

## Library of Congress

I am out walking in the morning with people and they say, "Aren't you the guy I saw last night on CNN? You are not a monster, are you?" "No, no." That was the way it was. It was a terrible, terrible process.

You don't have any allies because the State Department prevents you from having any conversation with anybody. You can't defend yourself, you can't talk to reporters, you can only let it go on. And the Italians, being very interested in the new American Ambassador (he is a very important person to them), were asking a lot of questions. "Who is this?"

I don't know if it is true or not, but the rumors are that the sitting ambassador was really not uncomfortable with this because he would have loved to stay on. Rumors are that he and his friends were not my biggest allies. I don't think that is true, but that is what some people say.

*Q: Well then let's move on. We are talking about 1989, when in 1989 did you go out?*

SECCHIA: I went in late June. We arrived on June 28, 1989.

*Q: June, 1989. From the President, the State Department, what were your priorities?*

SECCHIA: The priorities that had been listed at that time changed so rapidly. The main priority was the importance of the bilateral Italian relationship and NATO. You know most people forget when de Gaulle threw the Sixth Fleet out of France in 1967 it was the Italians that took them in. Most people forget that when the Dutch and the Germans wouldn't take the GLCMI (cruise missile) in that it was the Italians who took them in Comiso.

*Q: That was a particularly important thing. This was a lynch stone of much of what really helped disintegrate the Soviet Union.*

SECCHIA: That's right. And the Italians get very little credit for this because people only want to write about the idiosyncrasies of the Italian culture rather than the strengths of it.

## Library of Congress

It was a courageous act for both Craxi and Andreotti to take. And the deployment which came later which was even more difficult. And, also, it was the Italians who helped when we could not get the Belgians or others to deploy the NATO rapid deployment force to go to Incirlik, Turkey during the Gulf War. The Italians were the first to give their Tornados, which in turn embarrassed the others to coming forward. So in many ways the Italians were an important part of our NATO relationship. I had been briefed on the importance of this relationship. I had been briefed on a lot of issues which I still can't talk about.

We were greeted by the Italian people warmly and we worked hard at it. My wife and I visited all 96 provinces. We made friends with every consul general. We met all the staff in the consulates. We worked with the military. We had 31 military bases in Italy. Because of the Gulf War, because of the NATO buildup and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the military was important. In fact last night I had dinner with Adm. Bill Owens who is vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was my Sixth Fleet Commander when I was in Rome. He is a dear friend of mine to this day. Jon Howe, who was the deputy to Scowcroft I mentioned earlier, had been the CINCSOUTH at Naples for NATO and ended up being in Mogadishu for Boutros Boutros-Ghali. He was the Jon Howe who ran the Mogadishu operation, who was strongly criticized for the attack on Aideed and who has now had his career semi-destroyed by this activity which I believe was a political decision by the Clinton White House to go after Aideed. Jon Howe was a wonderful man whose career might have been destroyed by this because he was known in Italy as "the Butcher of Mogadishu." Unfairly again, but it is a press image of people. I knew all of these military people.

I took time to walk the country. I walked everywhere. I ran, I jogged, I skied, I boated. I walked every community, I walked and met people all up and down Italy...96 provinces, 234 cities.

*Q: After all this unfavorable and really nasty publicity, how did you find your support at the embassy? Where they sort of wondering who this guy was?*

## Library of Congress

SECCHIA: It was very difficult in the beginning because the Italians were suspicious. I had to win them over one by one. To this day, my DCM who was Daniel Serwer still calls me. Today, he is unhappy with his career. i.e. The way the State Department has been treating him and his associates. He confides in me. I think I earned his respect as I did with most of my staff. A large portion of them came to the airport to say goodbye. The week I left, Toto Riina was arrested, who was the Mafia kingpin they had been after for 28 years. I would like to think that we had a lot to do with that because after the explosion that blew up Giovanni Falconi, the prosecutor and his wife and three security agents...

*Q: This was down in Palermo?*

SECCHIA: Yes. Judge Giovanni Falconi had been our best contact with the Italian relationship on prosecutorial and anti-mafia activities. We had dinner with Giovanni just before he was blown up. We had dinner with him on Thursday night at Villa Taverna, on Friday my wife and I went north. On Saturday morning Giovanni Falconi hung a picture on his wall of he and I together and told his secretary (who announced this crying on television after the explosion), that I was his closest friend and that we worked together and how wonderful was our relationship. Giovanni Falconi was one of those people who was able to talk to the Pentiti (the squealers, the talkers). He was one who was able to send witness protection persons to the United States and then interview them. He understood American law and tried to change the Italian law so that they too could prosecute. When he was blown up on a Saturday afternoon, I was in Portofino. We flew back...we borrowed a car, we had given our driver the weekend off and I have to travel in an armored car (a security position), but we didn't wait, we just took a friend's car and drove to the airport without police security. We took a Navy jet and flew to Palermo. That is another story...I could talk an hour about that.

Italy worked with us to change the law after that. Martelli was the Minister of Justice and being a Socialist he always feared offending the large block of Communist vote. The left wing vote had never wanted to tamper with the post-Fascist year of laws which said there

## Library of Congress

would be no wire tapping; no surveillance; no police that aren't in uniform; you cannot trace private money. There were many laws that they had put in after the Fascist years to give people individual liberties. The Liberals on the left would never give those up. But until the government had permission for wire tap, surveillance, and undercover police work all of that was being done by our people for them. Because they couldn't do it, is why they couldn't capture their Mafia people who were always able to be one step ahead. With no money tracing, no electronic transfer of documents, etc. So we changed that law. I went to see Martelli. (I could also tell you stories about getting our forensic teams in to discover what had happened.) Meanwhile the Queen of England had visited the site. There had been chartered buses, the Italian tourist associations were selling tickets. By the time we got our forensic people in there the evidence had been destroyed. Two months later when Borsellino was blown up (he had been Falcone's associate), our forensic team was waiting at the airport in Washington. It happened at 5:00 and by 9:00 that evening we had permission to bring the forensic team in. Within months we had discovered who stole the car, where it came from, what kind of explosives, who provided them. It was the beginning of the end for the Mafia. At the same time Martelli agreed to try to change the laws and he did change the law.

My friendship with Falcone, his family coming to see me at the embassy, his family writing letters to the press that said, "Ambassador Secchia is the only person we trust, our own government couldn't protect my uncle," that kind of thing...they sent me a pen from his personal belongings. It brought big emotion. The Communists and the left had changed their name now to PCI, they agreed to support the reform so they changed the laws. I would like to think we had a lot to do with that. When I left Italy, the Italians personally presented me with the papers when they arrested Toto Riina after 28 years. So having captured the "boss of bosses" of the Mafia, who today has more and more people turning on him. There is more information coming out...having had a part of that, having had a part of the extradition of Al Jawary, the first Arab terrorist ever extradited...it was a successful team.

## Library of Congress

*Q: This was a very high priority, extradition, particularly after the “Achille Lauro” business where top terrorist was let free by the Italian government. Could you explain what led up to this and what your role and the embassy was in this?*

SECCHIA: One day, I can't remember exactly when it was, we received a phone call that the British intelligence people at the airport in Rome had spotted someone who they thought was an Arab terrorist. He had a briefcase with several identifications in it. We had a good relationship with the British and they called my people and my people called me saying they had this guy and think he is someone important. We need to stall his departure because we have to prepare the Federal papers so that everything is done legally. This is how we got in trouble on the “Achille Lauro,” we didn't have the right papers filed to keep Abu Nidal in Italy. So this time we were going to do it right. So again, I don't want to compare careerists to non-career, but because I had friends that I had made through friends, I was able to get his departure delayed.

While his departure was delayed overnight, our people worked around the clock preparing documents to give to the Italians that we thought this was a bad person of great significance. We were able to present those papers in the morning. Our Department of Justice people did an outstanding job working (with the FBI) to come up with who they thought this guy was. We arrested him. He had, I think it was nine different ID packages...I'm a little fuzzy over the years. We finally identified him as Al Jawary, a man who had provided the false identification for most of the Arab terrorists over the years. Now, a young person like you won't remember, but for several years we had had terrible terrorism in Naples, Frankfurt, PanAm 103, Greece, it was for our diplomats and our military...and we needed to apprehend these people. We then proceeded to wait a year and a half...I can remember when Bush came to a NATO summit in Rome in November, 1991, we were flying back to the airport and the last thing he said to me before he got on his new 747...no I was on his helicopter, Marine One, with him, Sununu, Scowcroft and



## Library of Congress

Baker...all four of them said to me, "Peter, get Al Jawary." They said it different ways like "You have an important task, you must get this guy."

The Italians meanwhile had been threatened by the Arab terrorists. If they gave him up two Italian ambassadors in North Africa would be "taken care of." The Italians were at times always willing to help us but would only go so far if their own people were threatened. This was a difficult issue for us. We tried to work all kinds of deals. Would we transport Al Jawary to a friendly third country for trial? Would we put him there and kidnap him there? Would we have US marshals arrest him at an international airport? We tried every scenario. We didn't think the Italians would give him to us. There were five people on their decision board and we needed three votes to make this work. The President of the Republic, the Foreign Minister; the Minister of Justice, the MOD, and the Prime Minister, who was the president of the council; President Andreotti; the Minister of Defense; Minister of Interior, who at that time was a friend of mine. We started working on them one by one. I would report back monthly how I thought I was doing. The Italians kept postponing it. A year and a half went by.

Finally one day during the Gulf War when most of the terrorist organizations had been neutered and Saddam Hussein, who had been funding a lot of this, was on his knees, it was an appropriate time for the Italians to make a move and they did. They gave us Al Jawary. So we had to secretly whisk him out of Rome and fly him home. We never made an issue of it. We never went public because the retaliation threats were still there. We just did it very quietly. He came home and was debriefed.

I received a cable of "Bravo, well done." If you go back historically, all the assassinations, all the problems we had, the bombings at the USOs, we never have extradited...we still are trying to extradite the Libyans of PanAm 103. We never, never in the history of our country extradited an Arab terrorist, or any terrorist that I know of. They usually get tried in Greece or Germany and then they are under that law. The Italians were the first, just like they were

## Library of Congress

the first to take GLCMs, the first to go to Incirlik, the first to take the Sixth Fleet, they were the first to give us a terrorist. So the relationship had a lot of value for the Americans.

This sent a signal, 17 years ago Al Jawary blew up in New York City an El Al office. He had used two bombs. One did not go off and had his fingerprints on it. Seventeen years later we found him. The signal that action sent out (just like the missiles in Comiso might have been the beginning of the end for the SSTs), the Al Jawary extradition might have been the beginning of the end for the Arab terrorists. They learned that after 17 years one finger print on a suitcase in a car in New York City, and we got him.

So that was a watershed. It was an interesting moment but a very important signal. For our intelligence community it was a great victory because it said, "We will get you, you son of a pup, no matter how long it takes." So the Al Jawary incident never got put into the press, but he is here and has been debriefed and we are learning a lot. I am out of the loop now.

*Q: The Italian government has always been sort of a cipher until very recently it has been basically the same government, the same people, switching...Andreotti has been going on and on and on. How did you deal with them? Where did you feel power was and what would the American Ambassador and also the American embassy deal with what always seemed like a closed political system?*

SECCHIA: Well, we are quick to be critical of that system, but if we think about it, we have constantly rotated our leadership between two parties, so how can we critical of them when they rotate it between four parties. We don't ever elect a liberal or conservative party candidate or the communist party candidate or the party of free love in the United States and they didn't elect the communist or the fascist. But what happened is that in their parliamentary form of government, in my judgment...they love America, they love what we stand for and they try very hard to duplicate what we did. But what they failed to do was create a government that could work with the stability as ours did because they wanted to give no one the power to do what Mussolini had done. They created a government through

## Library of Congress

their constitution that would allow no one to become all powerful, but it also made sure that no one would become powerful enough to stay in control. In doing this there were many parties created and these parties shared in a collective kind of voting where if your party got 3 percent of the vote you got 3 percent of the parliament. So if there are 900 members of the parliament, you got 27, even those you didn't get any votes in any one town higher than 2 percent or 1 percent...you might have gotten 5 percent in this area and the rest of the places you got 1 percent or less, but accumulatively you were 3 percent. So then you went to the party secretary who would say, "Okay, here is my list of prioritized senators. I get 27 so I will take these 27." So if you were good to the party secretary you were in the top 27, if you weren't, you were down below. It had nothing to do with popular vote, it was by party vote. So the party secretary became all powerful.

Now there are two reasons that I use to explain to people. Italian governments changed rapidly, but you see in America when Sullivan left as Secretary of Education, or when the Secretary of Defense Aspin resigned, we don't change governments. In Italy a government has to be changed whenever the balance changes. So let's say, for instance, you had a government of 29 ministers. Those ministers are put together by a group of party secretaries. Let's say the three of us are in this room. We would say you have 7 percent of the vote, I have 23. That is 30. He has 21, that is 51. We would probably come together and say, "Let's form a government. We have 51 percent. Can you deliver all your votes in parliament to approve our government?" "Yes" and "Yes." Okay, so now we are going to try it. So we sit down and you say, "Okay, I have 21 percent and I will give you 15 ministers." "And I will take 12 and give you 3." If we agree on what we want it might be that you only want five ministers, but you want Defense, Justice, Telephone and Telegraph and Labor. Now wait a moment, you can't have the four most powerful, I want..... So what we would do would be to divvy it up. I will take the Minister of Defense because most of my guys are strong on defense so I want to be in control of the military. You could have Sanitation. He would say, "Well, I only have 7 percent and I don't count, but without me you can't win." So we have coalition government, which I think is dangerous.

## Library of Congress

I will defend to the death our two party system because of this. This is what happened in the Pat Robertson/Kemp/Bush fiasco in Michigan. Bush had 45, Kemp at 10, so Kemp's 10 was in charge. The Robertson people gave Kemp the moon and he was running the show but he only had ten percent of the delegate vote. That's a problem. And here you would be an equal partner because your 7 percent is very important. So you might hold out for Minister of Telegraph and Telephone which has the most jobs. Jobs are very big in Italy because their post-war mentality of no jobs/ no food, an agricultural society that comes out of a culture that says "everybody is picking on us" and "we have been invaded 19 times in our history." They are very wonderful people. Peace loving and happy. But they just don't want to be harassed. Their history tells them that. So they try very hard to succeed with us as the role model.

So now we have formed our government and have our 29 ministers. Then we elect the minister of all ministers called the prime minister. That is why in these different modified forms of parliamentary government Americans don't understand it but the prime minister means the first minister. So use 29 ministers, you might be party secretary and appoint yourself a minister, but she wouldn't or I wouldn't. Then the 29 ministers sit down and since I had 27, you had 21, you had seven, we agreed that I am going to be prime minister or my guy, my party person. Most of the ministers come out of the parliament either the house or the senate side, very few come out of the private sector, which is different than in our country. If they aren't out of the parliament they are called technician ministers. They are specialists like the minister of finance might come out of a bank of Italy and is an economist. However, the minister of defense would never be a military person, just like in our country, so he would always be out of the parliament, never out of the private sector. So we vote amongst ourselves, we have amongst ourselves all 29 ministers.

Once we have a government formed, who are we going to elect. You are mad at me because I wouldn't give you Post and Telegraph, so you put a guy up against me. Now again your seven votes are going to make the difference. I can only deliver 27, he's got 21

## Library of Congress

and your 7 is 28. So you guys decide, "Okay, Secchia, we are not going to take Andreotti, I'm for \_\_\_\_\_. " I'm for Andreotti, you're Craxi and you want Amato. So you put Amato up. She has seven of her ministers that she thinks she controls, but she doesn't. She says she wants them to come with me, they put a block together and go with you. Amato wins, Andreotti losses. So Amato is the prime minister, president of the council.

Now when Sec. Sullivan resigned here, or when Sec. Aspin resigned it didn't make any difference. But in this government (that you two put together) if you have a resignation, one might not make a difference, but let's say two. Now the vote changes. If those two new guys you put in are going to vote for me, you call for reelection because you have a threat against you. So now we vote again and two of your people don't vote with him, they vote with me. So now my 27 has 2 of yours, his 21 only has 5 of yours, so he ends up losing and I am the new prime minister. So, hence we have a new government in Italy. We haven't really changed the government, we have changed two cabinet members and they changed their vote for president. And that is why in many cases in Italy you read "New Government," that they have 50 new governments in 50 years. This is because of these kinds of changes of coalition government. There would be times when we had to have four parties to get the 51 percent and Altissimo from the Liberal Party was sitting there. In that chair might be the Social Democrats who had two percent, so those two guys...(ironically Altissimo was in Grand Rapids last week visiting me)...but those two guys together had less than five percent of the vote. So any one of them took our group over the top because together we had 50.6 percent and those two guys gave us 54 percent. So they became a pain in the ass, just like you were originally. So now we have to deal with them and they would sit there and say, "Well, I'm mad." They would get mad over an issue, let's say fishing policy in Naples. They were powered based in Naples. Or tomatoes. The tomato problem in Italy...when we retaliated. When Carla Hills said, "Okay, if you are not going to buy our beef, we are not going to buy your tomatoes." So the party that is based in the Naples area where the tomatoes are grown threatens to walk out. If he leaves the

## Library of Congress

government, there is a new government because he takes two ministers with him. That is why all these changes, which really weren't changes.

*Q: Let's take trade, as the American Ambassador would you go to the party chairman, the party secretary? The official way would be to the foreign minister.*

SECCHIA: Let's talk about GATT. We had a problem with GATT that can never get resolved. The French wanted to stop the agricultural gains America had made and we wanted to break down the cartels and tear down the trade barriers that prevented our soybeans from going into that market. So you would sit down with your people and decide who controlled the committees and the legislature, just as you do here. I would call on the senator in charge of the committee. I would call on the minister of agriculture, the minister of foreign trade, the foreign minister, the prime minister and would argue the American position. They would tell me off the record that they didn't agree with the French position but that they were partners with France in the European Community and that slowly, slowly we will get to the right position. There was always amongst the Italians a very strong agricultural lobby because the Christian Democrats had the farm vote. Italy had thousands, if not millions, of small farmers because after the war and even before the war. Mussolini had given a lot of the wealthy land to the peasants. We ended up with a situation in Italy where everybody had five or ten acres of land just to live on. They saw themselves as farmers, probably because they got a lot of benefits as farmers. They got a lot of subsidies as a farmer. We were proving how subsidies were destroying our farms.

So that was the argument, you went to see everybody you could to get the Italians to vote. Normally the Italians voted the right way. They had their pride and independence, but they agreed with most of our position on most issues. There were times they had to work around the French and not be isolated. They want to be part of Europe. Even our own press, I noticed yesterday that Maureen Doud who is probably one of the most prominent reporters following the Presidency, reported that Clinton "left Italy and flew to Europe." That is an interesting slight, but in many cases it is how the Italians perceive themselves

## Library of Congress

as being cast in the North Africa, Greece, Turkey part of Europe and not part of Europe, not acceptable. If you remember the good old boys club the G7 was the G5, I believe, and it was under President Ford, who supported Italy and Canada (I am not sure they came in together). We supported Italy going into the G7. The Italian economy is bigger than Great Britain's today. It has come out of the ashes of the Second World War and grown to be this vibrant, exciting economy. And that is even with 20-40 percent unreported that we all know about.

*Q: The black market.*

SECCHIA: Now, again, in my judgment a lot of the problems might be opportunities, but because we have a very unique situation in Italy...you have a strong government political/economic partnership. IRI, the largest employer in Italy is owned by the government. The government appoints the bank directors. The government owns Alitalia that flies the airplanes and Al Italia that makes the airplanes. They own the steel mills that make the steel to make the airplanes. They own the coal that produces the steel. They own the electric company which make the electricity to burn the coal to make the steel to make the airplanes to fly the airplanes and they can control a large percentage of the travel because of the size of the government. So you have a socialist thinking type of government that had, up until the last year or two, control of the resources.

What you had then was very powerful senators and very powerful legislators and ministers who had within their office the right to decide the future from an economic sense, not just from a political sense, of many of their country people. So these ministers were a very important and cherished position in this debate we had a minute ago about how to form a government. If you ran the postal service and you decided that there would be a post office or not a post office, you could hire all the people you want in your post office. So you gave jobs which was very powerful. If you controlled transportation, you had the bridges, the highways, the railroads...just the linen contracts to launder the sheets on the trains was a scandal of years ago. There were lots of economic advantages



## Library of Congress

Meanwhile, you had a very unusual situation. You had a very powerful government that controlled an awful lot of the economic engine of the country. Then you had political systems that had been designed, post World War Two, and probably never fully thought out. If you think about how it was in 1948, 1950, it was "Stop the Communists." We don't want Yugoslavia to spread through Trieste. We fought to hold Trieste up until 1958 when we finally got the international community to give Trieste to Italy instead of Yugoslavia. We had Hungary which was invaded by the Soviets. We had Tito who feared the invasion of the Soviets and hid weapons, which are today in possession of the Serbs, but this was his program. So we would have done anything, in my judgment, under the years of Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles, the brinkmanship period...we would have done just about anything to keep the Communists out of power in Italy as we did in ....

*Q: And we were doing it.[pause in tape]*

Let's stick to the time you were there. The whole Italian government was beginning to unravel because of corruption at that time.

SECCHIA: Well, that is part of this problem. What happened was they created parties but never created a way to fund them. Culture in Italy isn't used to having people contribute. The Church and the State handle the charity. There are no tax deductions. In fact, only recently can you even give money to the Church and deduct it. There were no political contributions, so what happened was, again in my judgment, in the fifties when we stopped funding the friendly parties...we had helped rebuild Italy and it was working.

*Q: We put a tremendous amount of money into the CDU although it was technically a secret but an open one.*

SECCHIA: I don't know how it was done, all I know is that when we were no longer there...it was probably easier to support a political party in the late forties and fifties. When the country became bigger and more complex the political parties became more



## Library of Congress

involved. The reconstruction companies like IRI became more powerful. Instead of having to get a truck load of olives to the market you are talking about train loads of steel and high tech products and it became very important to business people. Now if you were a businessman in Italy you wouldn't want the Communists coming in and taking over the resources of the state and taking over your business. You liked the status quo so you were contributing but you didn't have a vehicle to contribute so you gave a little cash which became a little more cash and a little more. It became very important, almost like we had strong military support here when we had the evil Soviet Empire and when it crumbled we no longer needed it. In Italy when the Soviet Empire crumbled, in my judgment, so did the political system. Because if I was a businessman giving you money to stay in business Mr. Secretary and you would get elected and in the government and I kept the party going, no problem, you didn't take any money, I gave you the money. It was the bustarello, an envelope. But that bustarello became an all important envelope because it also meant the difference of whether you won a contract to build a bridge or build a harbor or you got to fly, your planes were purchased, etc. So the bustarello was not only to help you build your party, but it said, "Look, I want you people when you get into congress, to vote this way on this issue." So because you had the legislature in such powerful position that they could also make economic decisions. It isn't like in the United States where you can only get a legislator to change or impact legislation. That same legislator can't decide that you get a bridge contract in most cases. In Italy they could. So the bustarello got bigger.

Then it became "one for me and one for you." So certain politicians started taking the envelope and taking some case out for them. Others would take the envelope and pass the money down to others. But it was a way of doing business, just part of the culture. We knew it was happening, they knew it was happening, but nobody talked about it. We reported about it although we never had proof of it. We just knew it was happening. In many cases this went on to where the envelope got bigger, the rake off got bigger, the economy got bigger, and it kept feeding on itself to the point where one got Raoul Gardini.

## Library of Congress

He who recently killed himself. He was caught giving hundreds of millions of dollars to get a legislative vote on the privatizing of a federal company.

So, what happened, let's give an example. The way the story goes Gardini, who was a brilliant businessman (called "the farmer"), he captured the soybean market in Chicago in 1989. I had to call him in and reprimand him and give him my government's message. Gardini was the first to be involved in a private sector privatization of a federal or state owned company. The beginning of privatization was, "Okay Raoul, you can have 40 percent and we will merge your company and the state company to form this largest agro-chemical company in Italy. Feruzzi group owned 40, the state owned 40 and 20 was in the public market. It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out if Gardini got a hold of the 11 percent of the 20 that he would be in total control and that is what he did. At least that is what he is accused of doing. He then took charge and moved a little too fast. The legislators (the Socialist left), which were a part of the majority, felt that this should be slowed down a bit, that he was moving too fast. We appoint the directors, all the people and there is a little deal going here. He was going too fast for them. Finally he orchestrated a deal between Min. of State participation, which was one of the ministries of state. They said "You buy us or we buy you." They put a high price on it and he sold out making 5 billion dollars. But there was no stink, it went through, everybody voted, it was done. Well, it turned out now that he paid out 2 - 3 million dollars in gratuities to get people to go along with this deal. He made several billion on this deal, the tax payer lost. He got caught and shot himself.

That all was happening at the same time the Soviet Empire collapsed and you, with a pasta factory in Modena, had been giving an envelope to the parties who would keep the Communists out. There were no longer Communists, so why should I give you an envelope anymore? It is like in America, there is no longer an evil enemy so why build B-2s? Why do we need more tanks? So in Italy they just had their own peace dividend, but they put it in their own pocket.

## Library of Congress

So then the parties got into trouble. They needed to fund this machine that was giving out jobs and putting in ministers. So they had to go get bigger bustarello from the people who remained. As the different people pulled out of the anti-Communist group of these five parties, we needed to raise money. So we went back to those who gave us an envelope and asked them to put more money in it. So the envelopes got bigger yet and the parties got weaker yet and got in debt. At the same time all of the leadership was in their seventies and all of the population and voters were in their thirties. There was no longer a bond between paratroopers, partisans, anti-fascists. It was no longer, "I remember the old days when we were hungry." It was a "I want it now Daddy" generation. So the party leaders were being weakened, their envelopes were more crooked than ever...originally they were well worth it and we probably supported it...but now the bustarello was getting a little more tainted, they wanted something for it. The parties were broke, the leaders were old, the Communist Empire had disappeared, there was a global economy...you could sell your pasta all over the world. You didn't need the minister of agriculture because under EC and GATT you can do it yourself. But after the war you needed them because your family was living in a cave.

At the same time the young prosecutors like Dipietro were starting to chase rumors which in the past had been stifled by powerful political leaders who were no longer powerful. At the same time...in Italy they always appointed judges by party. The Communists had 30 percent of the parliament, they tried to get 30 percent of the judges. There is a Communist judge up in Venice who has been chasing Andreotti for ten years. He and his followers want to get Andreotti. In Italy a prosecutor in Milan can investigate a city commissioner in Palermo. There is no jurisdiction or boundary. So you have all of these accusations that come from anywhere with any motive to get somebody. So, up until now, when that happened Andreotti would talk to somebody, who would talk to somebody who would shut this guy up. Well, as they got older, the party got weaker, got in debt and the people were changing. The Church was losing its influence.

## Library of Congress

I like to draw the parallel to when I was a kid I used to go to this little pond and there were frogs, turtles and snakes there. After every storm when the sun came out, all the animals came out. When the animals came out they fought for a place in the sun. You could watch them. There would be one stick in the middle of the pond and a lot of seaweed. Up would come a turtle and lay on that stick and up would come another and they would be jamming for space. Then the frogs would come. I got to thinking that when the evil empire dissipated and the clouds parted and the sun came out all of us were looking for a place in the sun. Crimea was saying we don't want to be part of the Ukraine any more. The Serbs were saying that the Croats sided with the Nazis and killed hundreds of thousands of us, Tito is gone, we know where the weapons are stashed, we are going to get even, so the Serbs want to kill a couple of hundred Croats to get even. What are they doing? They are fighting for their place in the sun because the clouds have left.

In Italy you have the guy who has been giving an envelope for forty years saying to his son, "You know I gave the envelope but we don't need it any more, you keep it for the kids." That is what happened. If you study Italy and you know what they did and why they did it you would be a genius because this is the land of Verdi, Machiavelli...they love their music, they love their food, they love life. But their life is no different than our life, it is just that they have been in a very unusual...If Canada had invaded us six times in the last few centuries, we would have a hard time having an open border, wouldn't we.

*Q: There were these changes. How did we view something like the Lombardy League, which was a league of the north?*

SECCHIA: The Department of State never took a position. In modern day diplomacy we let the Italians pick who they wanted. If the Lombardy League wanted to secede and split Italy we wouldn't be supportive of that, but it really was none of our business. It was watched . . . but seldom given credibility.

*Q: Did you make contacts with these people?*

## Library of Congress

SECCHIA: Yes, we called on these people. In fact it backfired on us. My DCM called on them, and later they put out a press release that we had done so. It gave them credibility and we would have to refute the fact that we gave them credibility. But they were a moving force because I think 60 percent of Italy's budget is spent in the south and 17 percent of their GNP is produced in the north. So the north is angry about that. But I don't know if there is any real strength of changing the name of Italy or splitting it. Italians do not have a national presence. I used to tell President Cossiga that it was amazing how proud a Piedmontese would be about the Piemonte or a Bruzzezi would be about Abruzzo, but when they played their national anthem at a soccer game nobody took their hat off, people kept talking and eating. There was really no national spirit. There were still 20 different regions, each proud of their own region, protecting their own style of pasta, their bread, their fish, the way they cook their fish, the way they dress, and their folklore. Protecting the past and never worrying about the future. And yet the movement to make Italy a republic and have it unified...it is amazing because in the United States we would argue among states, but if anyone attacked our shores we would all come together on the beaches in a uniform fighting together. Whereas in Italy you would put troops together. The Alpini from the north and you would have their soldiers from Rome. They would still act regional. There is a regional mentality and concept that is in the culture which makes it very difficult for national spirit. They really don't have a president. They have a president that is elected but he is elected by the parliament. He is like the Queen of England. He approves government actions, he doesn't really get involved in government.

Response to questions in letter of June 6, 1994

1. Your view of the industrial leaders of Italy and how you dealt with them. Because I was a businessman, it was easy for me to deal with them. We had a lot in common. I was always impressed with the sense of style and the genius of art that the Italian businessman seemed to intuitively have. From the window display of a grocery store to the design of a elegant automobile . . . the Italians seemed to have this inherent sense. As industrial

## Library of Congress

leaders, they loved doing business with Americans and that too made it easy for me. Many of these industrial leaders are very proud of their association with American business people and, in fact, wore it proudly on their sleeve.

The AT&T partnership with Italcable and other major partnerships gave great impetus to our commercial activity. The little business person was ever receptive and large turnouts at Italian/American Chamber of Commerce events, NIAF events, and joint seminars were always very exciting. Larry Eagleburger distributed our Embassy Rome cables worldwide on two occasions.

2. Your view of the labor leaders of Italy and how you dealt with them.

These labor leaders were similar to the newspapers. They were normally appointed by the party to which they threw most of their votes. The communists and socialists seemed to have the biggest interest in the labor activities and turned out large labor groups whenever they wanted to have a demonstration or bring an issue into the press. The Christian democrats had their labor leaders too. However, all of these labor leaders and the parties have been realigned and now it's only the PDS (formerly the communists) that have much influence in any of the labor organizations.

3. Issues that concerned 1 & 2 and the United States.

Italian industrial leaders were always concerned that the fluctuating value of the dollar and their own government, two very inconsistent variables. The Italian labor leaders really didn't have much to do with the United States. Many of them would ask to come to the United States to have contact, but having been an appointee of a Republican government, I didn't have too many U.S. labor contacts for them. Nor was I ever directly asked. My Embassy staff did set up several joint meetings and there were leaders from American unions who came to Italy to talk to the Italian leadership. In those case, I was involved and supported those meetings. Issues that concerned industrial leaders in Italy on a domestic front were the Italian government's inability to control labor movement protests. Quite

## Library of Congress

often the Italian government would yield to the loudest and noisiest demonstration and this bothered industrial leaders who I often believed were slipping a lot of their personal cash out of Italy and investing it in other countries. A prime example of that would be the IFIN division of the FIAT family fortune. This was established in Luxembourg (1970-72) to invest their family fortune into “anything but Italian companies.” (Supposedly in fear of an eventual communist takeover.)

Industrial leaders were also concerned with the inability of the Milan BORSA to react in a very sophisticated manner. Their stock market didn't seem to function properly. I always thought this was the result of the fact that most people who understood Italian business knew that the accounting and the untruthfulness of the balance sheet was part of the game. i.e. If Cogafar (the construction division of FIAT) could spend millions of dollars for government cooperation (sometimes described as bribes) their balance sheet really wasn't truthful. If these same industrial leaders had elegant yachts, magnificent villas, and pallazzi in many cities, including Rome . . . there was also fear that this was being paid for by the company treasury. Therefore, if the companies were able to syphon off cash and to withdraw profit, it was pretty obvious to some that the stock market wasn't properly reflecting the potential of earnings per share or an accurate cash flow. This would be another reason why industrialists would be investing in the American market or in other securities outside of Italy.

### 4. Contacts with the Communist Party (PCI).

I had very few contacts with the communist party. In fact, it was State Department policy at the time that I (U.S. Ambassador - Rome) not meet with the communist party leaders. My DCM could do this with lower level people and when I noticed that Baker was taking Shevardnadze fishing in Wyoming, and that Bush and Gorbachev were seeing each other on a regular basis . . . I asked for permission to meet “secretly” with Achille Occhetto who was Secretary of the very powerful PCI. He understood that this meeting was not to be publicized. The Italian government was quite paranoid about the American Ambassador

## Library of Congress

having any contacts at all with the communist leaders in Italy. The communist party had one time risen to 36% of the vote and had recently dropped down to around 22% when I had my meeting. It was an enjoyable session and we talked about the goals of both of our governments. Ochetto's main mission with my Embassy was to achieve recognition and to see government officials in Washington (photo ops). This I told him I could not do. That was my only meeting with the communist party leader and this occurred about one month before I left post. I did it because I felt that the next Italian government might include members of the newly re-formed communist party (PDS). If that happened (and it did) the next Ambassador might have difficulty surmounting this "never having met" obstacle and at the same time working with a government that included that party. Therefore, I convinced my superiors to give me the opportunity to have this (un-announced) meeting so that the communists could not say that the Americans had not met with them before they were in the government. (Ciampi appointed two communist ministers soon after my departure. They both resigned over an issue I do not recall.)

### 5.Consultations with the Italian Government as Yugoslavia came apart.

The Italians were very concerned about Yugoslavia and we had many discussions regarding this. I could dictate for hours on this one subject. I think the most revealing development of all these discussions was the fact that the Italians appropriated adequate funding and expected a large number of refugees from the Catholic Republic of Croatia. However, the Catholics didn't come to Italy. The Muslims did. That became another problem since the Italians felt they already had too many Muslims, after Kohl and the Holy Father led the world into recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. The Italians felt that the Baker-Bush policy on recognizing Croatia and Slovenia was the correct path. But Kohl and the Holy Father pushed recognition prior to boundary agreements which was a mistake.

### 6.Our concerns over the exodus of refugees from Albania.



## Library of Congress

It was common knowledge that the first ship that came to Brindisi was orchestrated and arranged for the electronic media. Afterwards, Gianni De Michelis, the foreign minister at that time, arranged a package with the Albanian government. The Italians in effect paid the Albanian government to keep their people home. This was a policy that De Michelis also attempted to use in the Yugoslavian refugee situations. He believed that when it came to Africa, Yugoslavia and Albania, that it would be more expensive for the Italian government to take care of the refugees after they were in Italy than it would be to pay their governments to keep them out of Italy.

7. Your view of some of the personalities in Italian public affairs.

Wonderful people who are friendly to the Americans. Those who I thought did an outstanding job were Gianni De Michelis, who made quick decisions and in most instances was supportive of our position during the Gulf War. It was very difficult to get decisions out of the Italian government because there was a five party coalition led by the church oriented Christian Democrats. The Pope had given 43 speeches opposed to American foreign policy in Iraq. De Michelis was one we could call on and who in many instances did an outstanding job going forward and publicly speaking out in support of our policy.

Bettino Craxi was another strong leader in Italian politics. He had no trouble making a decision. If I went to his office with problems involving anyone in the socialist party, whether it be Minister Martelli (minister of justice) or other socialist ministers of defense, etc., Craxi would pick up the phone and straighten out the problem.

Andreotti was a man who I find hard to believe would have anything to do with the Mafia other than to acknowledge their existence and recognize that he alone could not fight this organization. He was a very well read historian whose knowledge of the U.S. and world history always amazed me.

## Library of Congress

Remember, after the years of fascism, the Italian legislature passed laws that protected the civil rights of many. There was no wire-tapping, there was no under cover surveillance or out of uniform police work. There was no tracing of money or data on family financing . . . all to protect the civil rights of people and to make sure that there would never be another fascist police state like that of Mussolini.

However, the Mafia flourished under these civil rights and then became a very strong and powerful part of Italian politics in the south. Andreotti's Christian Democrat party had a lot of its vote in the south but I still find it hard to believe that he was involved or ordered any of the murders that other are now saying he ordered. He was a brilliant man, well read, and I do believe that he is a true friend of the United States and western democracy. Andreotti did a lot for the governments of southern Europe and did much for the Italian people. It's amazing that he was in leadership in 1948 when Italy was an agrarian economy shipping only truck loads of agricultural products and he was still a leader when they were the fifth largest industrial economy in the free world 45 years later. I'm sure that through all of this he never became a wealthy man as many other Italian politicians did. In my personal opinion the conclusion to all of this will prove that he was in fact a statesman, not an assassin.

Georgio Lamalfa was the secretary of the Republican Party. I think he had that leadership position only because of his father's name and the respect that his father had earned. Though Georgio was pro-American he was left leaning and at often times threatened to work with the communists. The left was always a threat to the center. He played this to the hilt through the coalition government years. Since he had only 2 - 5% of the parliament it was to his advantage to be the swing vote in a 51 - 53% coalition.

8.How you dealt with presidential and secretary of state and congressional visits.

On U.S. congressional visits - we avoided them. Our staff detested them. Most of our congressmen were an embarrassment. They wore the wrong clothes. They came to the

## Library of Congress

wrong meetings. They treated the Italians with disdain, and in many cases they were not well educated nor had they completed their homework. Some were dumb, dumb, dumb. I guess I'd have to admit that I spent a lot of my time trying to convince congressional delegations not to come visit. I was upset in the beginning, with the fact that many of them came on a Friday and spent the weekend shopping and left on a Monday. All the time asking for staff support from a very tight budget. I departed post wishing that all of them would cancel their visits or come only to shop. When we had briefings for them they weren't paying attention nor were they well aware of the situations concerning the bilateral relationship. Every once in a while there was one who wasn't interested in shopping or a photo op but that was the rare occasion.

The major problems were senators like Claiborne Pell who thought they had all the answers and were the most brilliant in the world. Yet they couldn't stay awake. Congressmen like Jack Brooks, who had such disdain for our foreigners and minorities that he treated everyone like they were an immigrant washer woman. Congresswoman Schroeder made our military feel unwanted and foolish.

Secretary of State Baker's trips were very well trained and they would work, work, and work. So much so that you almost felt like he didn't need an Ambassador. He had his mind made up. I guess if one were to ask if he ever accomplished his goals, you would have to say "almost every time." He knew what he wanted and he was a great negotiator. I often heard it said that if you had a choice of being in a foxhole with one person, that's the guy you would choose.

On presidential visits, George Bush was an easy president to host. He was well liked by the Italians and riding a very high popularity when he came to visit me for a NATO Summit in 1991. We didn't see much of him toward the end of the campaign when his numbers were dwindling. However, the Italians were always interested in George Bush and one of the reasons that Clinton was able to paint him as the "international president" and one not versed in domestic policies, was because Bush did have this relationship with the

## Library of Congress

Europeans. Especially the Italians. His visits were well received and I would say other than some of his staff, they went very well.

I can think of one example when they came to the Villa and wanted breakfast for the staff and those who were coming to meet the President. This turned out to be their drivers, their photographers, their nurses, their doctors, and all of "strap hangers" who travel with the President. Later on the President's office refused to pay me for the breakfast even though a staffer had ordered it. I had to pay for it myself. (\$300)

9.The role of the Italian-American Congressman in our relations.

These are very important. The Italians feel very strongly that their exported citizens have a potential contribution to the future of the world through all of their Canadian/Italians, American/Italians, Argentina/Italians, etc. They spend a lot of time at this and have recently created a ministry for "Italians Abroad."

The Italian/American Congressman is held in very high respect and the visits are enjoyed by the Italians. Both Democrats and Republicans were always well received. Normally the Italian/American Congressman was not as big a problem as the others because in most instances he/she had relatives to visit, places he wanted to go, and was hosted at one social event after another by those who were proud to know him/her an Italian/American Congressman.

The Italian/American Congressperson in most cases was interested in furthering the relationship and worked rather well with the Embassy. They understood Italy.

10.How valuable you found the diplomatic social life in Rome.

Not very valuable. I made all the perfunctory calls on the major ambassadors (64) and from time to time would have to call on an ambassador to resolve a bilateral problem. I remember working very closely with the British Embassy on trying to extradite an Arab

## Library of Congress

terrorist that their intelligence people had apprehended. But, in most cases it was a game of chicken. The French ambassador was always interested in helping France and could care less about America. I was interested in America and could care less about France. My role was to improve the relationships between Italy and the United States and that's what I worked on. It didn't help me to have a good relationship with the French Ambassador to do this. The Italians didn't care much for him either.

Though we all worked together in NATO - we had a NATO ambassador and DOD was watching this.

The Italians and the French didn't get along. The Germans and the Italians seemed to get along but on a very official basis. There were very few social/diplomatic events in Rome. The pecking order was too disproportionate. The American Ambassador is treated like royalty. (This wasn't me - it was the desk I was using and the flag I represent.) That made it difficult for other ambassadors because the Italians would fawn over my wife and me. However, when we looked at it the other way, there wasn't much that other ambassadors could do for us. It's almost ironic that the Russian ambassador Adamiscin once asked me if I would help him with the Italian government. He wanted to get him a police escort so he could get through traffic (just like I had). He could get no one to see him. The Swedish ambassador told me she waited a year for the foreign minister to see her.

11. How you spent a typical day.

Early in the morning to very late at night there were too many people to meet, too many visitors who wanted to visit, too many cables to write, and not a very effective and efficient secretarial staff to do the communicating. The secretaries sent to Rome are people who usually have problems. Many of them have no social life in the United States and, therefore, this diplomatic service has become their life. Their ranking through Civil Service and their commitment to travel makes them job qualified. It has nothing to do with their talent. Their lack of talent also seems to be unimportant. I had one secretary who could

## Library of Congress

not use her word processor and I had another one who didn't have a word processor because we couldn't afford to buy her one. In 1989 we were still using 1968 techniques. They did not even have dictation systems. They still took dictation on note pads. It took me 2 - 3 days to get letters out and that was very seldom to the standard to which I was accustomed. Spelling was atrocious.

Their dedication was adequate and their desire to do the job was in most cases unquestioned. However, they are poorly trained and I do not believe that they start at an high level of efficiency. This made a typical day very long because for me to do the work I had to do, it took 7 secretaries. (I know, I can't believe it either.) However, there just wasn't enough efficiency to get the job done. There were too many vacations, too many sick days, too much home leave, too many special arrangements for administrative leave, bereavement leave, etc. Most people are only in the office 63% of the working days needed. So 7 secretaries is probably equivalent to 3 1/2. If you consider that 1-1/2 good people could do the protocol work, you needed two in an office as full time efficient secretaries. You could probably staff a G-7 embassy this way.

A typical day for me was getting through all this paper work, cables, and trying to learn what was going on by keeping abreast of the Italian newspapers, meeting Italians. In fact, I only went home for lunch one day a week on the average. There wasn't enough time. Every evening there were 2 - 3 social events. My wife and I traveled almost every weekend because we felt that we wanted to see the entire country. We visited all 96 provinces. Most of this travel was as a guest of Italians because we didn't have the travel budget and we had an 8 year old car that was continually breaking down. The car, the mobile phone, the secretarial help and the equipment that we had to use was an embarrassment. There just wasn't any funding for this because of the low value of the dollar. We had to buy our own swimming pool furniture to put around the pool at Villa Taverna. This cost me \$28,000. I imagine a career ambassador would have known how to get that money but it would have had to come from some other fund. I spent a good portion of my day trying to figure out how to pay the bills and how to have one of the

## Library of Congress

largest RIFs (reduction in force) in the history of the State Department. We reduced our staff by 42 people.

End of interview